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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000262

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Final Winograd Report

Key stories in the media:

Israel Radio reported that this morning six gunmen opened fire at the Israeli Embassy in Nouakchott, Mauritania. No Embassy staff were hurt in the attack.

All media quoted former PM Binyamin Netanyahu as saying on Thursday: "The people of Israel know today that they are led by a prime minister who is not qualified or fit to lead them. Barak knows this and he knows that the public expects him to ensure that this failed leadership does not continue." Ha'aretz reported that on Thursday Kadima ministers closed ranks around PM Ehud Olmert at a meeting in Tel Aviv. The Jerusalem Post quoted associates of Labor Party Chairman Ehud Barak as saying that he will neither quit the government nor push for immediate elections, but that he will decide over the weekend whether to press hard for Kadima to replace Ehud Olmert with an alternative prime minister. Major media reported that the Knesset will debate the Winograd report on Monday. In its lead story, Yediot found that Olmert prevails over Barak in a public opinion poll (see under: polls).

Ha'aretz reported that senior IDF officers have characterized the Winograd Commission's findings on the army's performance in the Second Lebanon War as "nothing less than an earthquake."

Maariv cited the belief of political sources that Gilad Shalit -- and perhaps the diplomatic process -- will dominate the activity of the government in a few weeks. Yediot and Israel Radio quoted the Damascus-based Hamas leader Khaled Mashal as saying in the Italian weekly Panorama that Shalit is alive, healthy, and being treated "with white gloves." The radio also quoted Mashal as telling Panorama that Hamas is willing bring about a truce of at least 10 years with Israel, provided the latter withdraws [from the territories], recognizes [the Palestinians' right to] Jerusalem, the right of return, and dismantles the settlements. Khaled also said that "evil is being helped by some of our brothers [the PA, under Mahmoud Abbas] who support it with silence and complicity." Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post cited press agencies quoting EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner as saying on Thursday that EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana and Mideast Quartet envoy Tony Blair are to travel to the Middle East next week to work out a solution for better access to Gaza.

Ha'aretz quoted the state as saying a few days ago that it is suspending the construction of a neighborhood in the Givat Ze'ev settlement north of Jerusalem, contrary to PM Olmert's promise to Shas leader Ali Yishai that there would be no freeze in the greater Jerusalem area. Ha'aretz also reported that UNESCO is attempting to mediate between Israel, Jordan, and the Waqf Muslim religious trust over construction at the controversial Mugrabi Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem. Visiting UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura discussed the efforts in an interview with Ha'aretz this week.

Major media reported that on Thursday IDF troops shot and killed an Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades militant who approached the border between Israel and the southern Gaza Strip, east of Rafah.

Reporting on the decision by the UN Security Council to abandon a presidential statement on the situation in Gaza, The Jerusalem Post noted that it was a rare victory for Israel, and that the ensuing discussions signified a subtle shift away from the condemnation of Israel "typical of the international body." The Jerusalem Post reported that the office of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour expressed concern on Wednesday over the "incompatibility of some of the provisions" of the Arab Charter on Human Rights "with international norms and standards." On January 24, she had praised its ratification as a "step forward."

Major media reported that the Winograd Commission charged that the IDF's rules for using cluster bombs were unclear and that it called on the army to review them with the aim of reducing civilian casualties from bomblets that explode after the end of hostilities.

Maariv reported that the remains of Alona Avraham, an Israeli who traveled on United Airlines Flight 175 that crashed into the World Trade Center on 9/11, were interred in Ashdod on Thursday.

Ha'aretz (English Ed.) reported that the American Embassy in Tel Aviv has added more appointment slots to its Web site in a move that it claims has reduced waiting time for reporting citizen births abroad to just over two months. The move followed a "public outcry" over lengthy waits, first reported by Ha'aretz. Yediot presented the results of a Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll (in parentheses, results of a previous poll):

Whom would you like to see as prime minister?

Binyamin Netanyahu: 33% (30%); Ehud Olmert: 18% (8%); Ehud Barak: 14% (17%); 38% are undecided (37%).

Ha'aretz printed the results of a Dialog poll (in parentheses, results of the Dialog poll conducted on May 1, 2007, after the interim report):

What do you thing PM Olmert should do [after the publication of the final Winograd report]?

Resign: 53% (68%); stay as PM and fix mistakes: 37% (23%); 1% (9%) are undecided.

What do you thing Defense Minister Barak should do [after the publication of the final Winograd report]?

Remain in the government: 36% (24%); resign and act to move up elections: 36% (4%); call for Olmert's replacement: 14% (17%); 14% (19%) are undecided.

Maariv presented the results of a TNS/Teleseker poll conducted on Wednesday (other questions than those asked on Thursday):

"Were elections held today, for whom would you vote?"

(Results in Knesset seats -- in brackets, 2006 elections results.)

Likud: 32 (12); Labor Party (under Ehud Barak) 21 (19); Kadima (under Ehud Olmert): 11 (29); Yisrael Beiteinu 10 (11); Shas: 10 (12); National Union-National Religious Party: 9 (7); Arab parties: 9 (10); Social Justice (under Arkady Gaidamak) 7; Meretz-Yahad: 6 (6); United Torah Judaism: 5 (7); Pensioners Party: 0.

"Were the party map to change, for whom would you vote?"

Labor-Kadima bloc (under Tzipi Livni): 39; Likud-Yisrael Beiteinu bloc (under Netanyahu): 38; Shas: 10; National Union-National Religious Party: 8; Social Justice: 7; United Torah Judaism: 5; Meretz-Yahad 4; Pensioners Party: 0.

Final Winograd Report:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "If there is any Realpolitik justification for Olmert's continued tenure, it lies in the faint hope that if the Prime Minister is already fated to fall, he will at least choose to fall on the sword of peace efforts rather than the sword of a failed war."

Columnist Calev Ben-David wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Not taking bolder action than [government members] have until now means simply keeping their cabinet seats warm through the cold winter for Netanyahu and the Likud until the next election."

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "Fortunately for Olmert, his enemies made everything depend on the last 60 hours [of the ground offensive]."

Deputy Managing Editor and right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote in The Jerusalem Post: "The source of the government's failure in Lebanon 18 months ago and of its failures in Gaza today is its political commitment to the strategy of unilateral withdrawal from territory."

Block Quotes:

I. "Fall on the Right Sword"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (2/1): "If Prime Minister Ehud Olmert thought he would be 'let off' by the Winograd Commission, just as he has been saved thus far from an incredible number of other investigations against him during his brief tenure, he was mistaken.... Olmert's immediate resignation or ouster would satisfy a desire for revenge and let him go down in history as Israel's worst prime minister ever. The question is how

the state would benefit from this, given that his removal would absolve him, and us, of any attempt to satisfy the obligations he has undertaken, on the basis of which he was elected with a party and coalition that may well prove one-time events. This is all the more true when the alternative is a policy that gloried in torpedoing the Oslo Accords and has a hidden but firm agenda of not dividing the land. Following the report's publication, Olmert will no longer have the excuse that he is waiting for Winograd and so is refraining from bold actions that would implement his diplomatic declarations. If there is any Realpolitik justification for Olmert's continued tenure, it lies in the faint hope that if the Prime Minister is already fated to fall, he will at least choose to fall on the sword of peace efforts rather than the sword of a failed war."

II. "Olmert Must Look Beyond Mere Survival"

Columnist Calev Ben-David wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (2/1): "The Winograd Report may have bought the government breathing space until the next national vote, but it has not improved the electoral prospects of anyone sitting in it; if anything, the opposite is true. Simply surviving the report has until now provided the coalition with all the 'vision horizon' it needed. From here on in, though, with the impact of Winograd melting away as fast as the winter snows that fell this week, it will have to prove to the public, especially its own constituencies, that it has some purpose beyond staying in power. For 18 months the Olmert government has been largely reactive, including in the peace process, where it has been primarily responding to the Bush administration's initiatives. Taking a more proactive approach -- be it a large-scale operation in Gaza, staking out solid positions on final-status issues in the peace talks, evacuating the outposts, even some kind of response to the Iranian nuclear project -- carries real risks, political and otherwise, for Olmert, Barak, Livni et al.

But not taking bolder action than they have until now means simply keeping their cabinet seats warm through the cold winter for Netanyahu and the Likud until the next election."

III. "The Other Way Around"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (2/1): "The final [Winograd] report was a pale compromise document that shrank in comparison with the expectations built in the first one and, with its minor tone, granted Olmert a new life. If in its first report, the commission wanted to topple Olmert almost at all cost, in its second report it tried with the same fervor to rescue him.... The two Winograd reports should have appeared in the reverse order... Fortunately for Olmert, his enemies made everything depend on the last 60 hours [of the ground offensive]. When this died down, all the rest fell. This is one good thing we can say about Olmert. We utter it wholeheartedly. But this is also the only good word we owe Olmert after that war."

IV. "Will We Now Be Silent?"

Deputy Managing Editor and right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick

wrote in The Jerusalem Post (2/1): "The Winograd Commission properly noted the government's failure to define what it was doing in Lebanon. But it did not explain why the government failed. The source of the government's failure in Lebanon 18 months ago and of its failures in Gaza today is its political commitment to the strategy of unilateral withdrawal from territory. Olmert's Kadima Party and Barak's Labor Party have embraced this strategy. It is the centerpiece of their governing rationale.... During the war in Lebanon and since Israel withdrew from Gaza, the guiding assumptions of the unilateral withdrawal strategy have proven false. But Israel's leaders have refused to acknowledge reality. Rather they claim that it is reality, not their policy, that is mistaken. Their daily search for new silver bullets is a manifestation of their denial of reality."

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